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Jan., 1855.



MEMOIR OF JOSEPH R. BROWN.

[Paper read before the Minnesota Editorial Association, 1871.]

Maj. JOSEPH R. BROWN, an ex-editor and publisher of Minnesota, one of the most widely known public men of our State, and at his death, its oldest white settler, died in the city of New York, November 9th, 1870, while on a business visit to that place.

JOSEPH RENSRAW BROWN was born January 5th, 1805, in Harford county, Maryland. His father, who was a man of much ability and energy, and was a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, removed soon after to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and settled on a farm there. JOSEPH'S mother died when he was an infant. When about fourteen years of age, his father apprenticed him to a printer in Lancaster, but being treated with great harshness and injustice by said person, he soon after "ran away;" and the first intelligence his father received from him was, that he had enlisted in the army and had marched with his company "out west." He came to what is now Minnesota, with the detachment of troops that built Fort Snelling in 1819, and remained a resident from that time until his death, a period of over fifty years.

On leaving the army, somewhere about 1825, he resided at Mendota, Saint Croix and other points in the State, and engaged in the Indian trade, lumbering and other occupations. His energy, industry and ability soon made him a prominent character on the frontier, and no man in the Northwest was better known. He acquired a very perfect acquaintance with the Dakota tongue, and attained an influence among that nation (being allied to them by marriage), which continued

unabated to his death. He held, at different times during his life, a number of civil offices, which he filled with credit and ability. In 1838, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace by Governor DODGE, of Wisconsin, and for several years had his office at his trading post, at Grey Cloud, about 12 miles below Saint Paul. He was elected a member of the Wisconsin Legislature from "Saint Croix county" in 1840, 1841 and 1842, taking prominent part in those sessions. He was also a leading member of the famous "Stillwater Convention" of citizens held in August, 1848, to take steps to secure a Territorial organization for what is now Minnesota. He was the Secretary of the Territorial Councils of 1849 and 1851, and Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives in 1853, a member of the Council in 1854 and '55, and House in 1857, and Territorial Printer in 1853 and '54. He was also a member from Sibley county, in the Constitutional Convention ("Democratic Wing") of 1857, and took a very prominent part in the formation of our present State Constitution. He was likewise one of the Commissioners named in that instrument to canvass the vote on its adoption, and of the State officers elected under it. He shaped much of the Legislation of our early, territorial days, and chiefly dictated the policy of his party, of whose conventions he was always a prominent member.

Maj. BROWN carried on, for a number of years, a very large and widely extended business as an Indian trader and supply agent, and, at the time of his death, had a trading post at Big Stone Lake, on our extreme western frontier. He also figured somewhat as an inventor, and after many years of study and experiment, and heavy outlay of means, had about completed a steam road wagon, or "Traction Motor," which he felt confident would prove a success, when his death occurred. He suffered the reverses of fortune incident to life on the frontier, and during his career made and lost large amounts, leaving at his death, I am informed, but a small estate. He always bore his losses with cheerful equanimity. He was a man of most remarkably unruffled and happy temper. In an acquaintance of fifteen years, I do not recollect to have ever seen the cheerful smile he always wore clouded by any reverses of fortune he

may have met with. He was always genial, good-humored and sociable.

But it is as a journalist and publisher I desire principally to speak of him here. His first regular entrance into the printing business in Minnesota, was in the year 1852, though he had before written considerable for the press. Shortly after the death of JAMES M. GOODHUE, which occurred in August of that year, Major BROWN purchased the "Minnesota Pioneer," and edited and published it under his own name for nearly two years. In the spring of 1854, he transferred the establishment to Col. E. S. GOODRICH. During the period of his connection with the paper, he established a reputation as one of the most sagacious, successful and able political editors in the Territory, and as a sharp, interesting and sensible writer.

In 1857, he established at Henderson, which town had been founded and laid out by him a short time before, a journal called the "Henderson Democrat," which soon became a prominent political organ, and was continued with much ability and success until 1860 or '61.

In speaking of Maj. BROWN as an editor, I can do no better than to use the graceful and elegant tribute from one¹ whose pen never touched a subject without adorning it, and whose long acquaintance with Maj. BROWN ensures its faithfulness as a portrait :

"JOSEPH R. BROWN was a great man in many of the best senses of that term, and never a common man in any sense. Without education, according to its scholarly significance, he yet knew much of all that scholars know, and more of that in which they are ignorant.

* * * We have known him to dash off more than twenty sheets of foolscap in a single night, upon a great variety of topics, requiring, in some cases, the use of precise and technical language, and exhibiting a range and accuracy of information which, considering the life he led and that he was a man without letters, we regard as unsurpassed by any intellectual feat which we have known any others to perform.

"The mind of Major Brown was of the ruggedest Saxon type, and his language and mode of thought always simple, clear, logical and strong. His manuscript rarely required revision, and never except as to tautology or some such slight rhetorical fault. His method of statement and argument has not been excelled by any professional

¹ Col. E. S. GOODRICH.

writer in the State. To his clearness and strength he added a most persuasive tone, and a humor that won the kindly feeling of those whose interests or principles he combatted. Without further culture than such as experience gives, he must have acquired a wide and solid reputation, had his powers been regularly employed as a writer for the press."

In the brief space allotted to me for this memoir, I have only glanced at some of the prominent traits of Maj. BROWN's character, and the principal events of his life. He was, all in all, one of the most remarkable men which our northwestern frontier has developed, and it would require literally a volume to give the leading incidents of his long and eventful career. In the various and contradictory characters of soldier, pioneer, legislator, lumberman, public officer, editor, politician, trader, inventor and town-site speculator, he showed the versatility of his genius and energy of his character. He had faults, of course, but they were such as could be easily overlooked and forgiven by his friends. And as one of the pioneer editors and publishers of this State, his memory should always be respected by the members of the editorial fraternity of Minnesota.

J. F. W.

[From the St. Paul Pioneer, November 15th, 1870.]

"Why, God bless you! Come in!"—at St. Paul, in 1854, and "God bless you! Good night!" at New York, in 1870, were the first salutation and last farewell received by the writer from JOSEPH R. BROWN. And between these two have been blessings numberless, but no curses. His heart did not breed curses, nor would his lips utter them. And so, in the memory of these kindly greetings and farewells, which come back upon us now as benedictions, let us render some tribute to the great and good hearted man who has just passed away.

For JOSEPH R. BROWN was a great man in many of the best senses of that term, and never a common man in any sense. Without education, according to its scholarly significance, he yet knew much of all that scholars know, and more of that in

which they are ignorant. Without familiarity with the social refinements of life, his intercourse with men showed that native delicacy and kindness of heart are better than the best of breeding. Passing the bulk of his days among the rude and unlearned, or leading the more solitary life of trader or frontiersman, he was a man of mark and influence in any assemblage where he might be placed, whether in an Indian council in the wilds of the West, or in a National Convention in the centre of civilization. Persuasive as a speaker, simple, homely, but strong as a writer, modest and winning in private intercourse, he needed only the polish of the schools to have graced any position, or have honored any profession or pursuit. This is not the language of eulogy. No man of intelligence could come in contact with Major BROWN, without admitting his ability; he was more than a common man who did not feel inferiority in his presence, and less than a generous man who did not acknowledge it.

Major BROWN's qualities are best known and appreciated by those who mingled in the early politics of Minnesota. With a mind well stored with the elementary principles of law and political science, with a familiar knowledge of persons and localities, and with a natural aptitude for affairs, he took prominent part in all public movements, and grew in influence with the expanding growth of the Territory and State. It was noticeable to witness the effect of his appearance at the capital to attend upon the sessions of the Legislature during these early periods in our politics. He had, perhaps, spent months on the frontier, or beyond the limits of civilization, but, by some process, he had kept even with the current of events, and needed little in the way of fact or hint to render him master of the situation. All the little-great and great-little men who thronged to the capital at such seasons, and called themselves politicians, were anxiously waiting his arrival, which, with a humor that had just a dash of malice in it, he would sometimes delay until the latest hour. But the whole alphabet of Honorables rested quiet when he came. He was Cushing's Manual, and Kent's Commentaries, and Political Economy, and Sir Oracle, without pretence; he was the safely trusted friend, counsellor, committeeman, scribe, even, to all—except the

HON. PRETENTIOUS SQUIRT. The Hon. SQUIRT would show his sagacity by patronizing "Jo." BROWN. Before the session had half passed the Hon. SQUIRT was squelched. Not maliciously squelched, though, for if any Hon. SQUIRT proved to be only surfacely so, and gained sense enough to realize his true status, no one would aid more heartily than the Major in setting him on his feet again. But no Hon. SQUIRT ever forgot the ordeal through which he had passed, or repeated the patronizing experiment of "Jo."ing Major BROWN.

The amount of work which Major BROWN would perform during these legislative sessions, was something remarkable. Passing the legislative hours at the Capitol in watching and directing the details of legislation, his evenings and nights were consumed in the caucus, in the framing of bills, the preparation of committee reports, the composition of a speech for some NOODLES—whose support to an important measure would be gained by enabling him to play the part of an oratorical puppet,—and in writing editorials or correspondence for the press. We have known him to dash off more than twenty pages of foolscap of a single night, upon a great variety of topics, requiring, in some cases, the use of precise and technical language, and exhibiting a range and accuracy of information which, considering the life he led, and that he was a man without letters, we regard as unsurpassed by any intellectual feat which we have known any other to perform.

The mind of Major BROWN was of the ruggedest Saxon type, and his language and mode of thought always simple, clear, logical and strong. His manuscript rarely required revision, and never except as to tautology or some such slight rhetorical fault. His method of statement and argument has not been excelled by any professional writer of our State. To his clearness and strength he added a most persuasive tone, and a humor that won the kindly feeling of those whose interests or principles he combatted. Without further culture than such as experience gives, he must have acquired a wide and solid reputation, had his powers been regularly employed as a writer for the press.

Maj. BROWN's knowledge of human nature was thorough and extensive. He knew men as a scholar knows books. This

knowledge, with his knowledge of affairs, and the skill with which he used both in the business of politics and legislation, caused him to be designated the "Juggler," in our early partisan slang. No epithet was ever more undeserved. What the herd, who were his inferiors, denominated juggling, was only the exercise of his superior sagacity. He bribed no man, nor did he accomplish his ends by mean or unworthy tricks. But he was clear, strong, fertile and ingenious, and frequently carried schemes which were deemed impracticable, by consummate tact and unyielding tenacity—surprising his friends with unlooked-for success while he confounded his enemies. He delighted in the manipulation of men; and sometimes, we have thought, humorously involved measures and members in the mazes of legislation, that he might enjoy their struggles to escape from the dilemma into which they were cast. This, however, was confined to immaterial matters; he never jeopardized a scheme of importance by inconsiderate or humorous trifling.

So much interest did Major BROWN take in public affairs, and so much importance was attached to his presence and advice upon public measures, that, from the organization of the Territory until the State was fairly in working order, he was rarely or never absent from a general convention of his party, or from a legislative session. It is thus that nearly all the important legislation which forms the basis of our present code bears the impress of his mind. This is especially so in respect to those features which are novel to our system, and are stamped with liberality, progress and reform. It would surprise any one unfamiliar with the subject, to contrast the code of Minnesota with that of any leading Eastern State, and observe the superiority of our system in every liberal, humanitarian aspect. The centres of population, wealth, refinement and culture, which are shackled by precedent and tradition, are not the sources of ameliorating laws; these spring from the freer, fresher, more generous life of new communities. The mass of this liberal legislation, if it did not owe its paternity to Major BROWN, had always in him a hearty and efficient advocate; and his labors therein entitle him to honorable memory.

—This rambling sketch,—not intended as an analysis of Major BROWN's character, but merely as supplementary to the detailed accounts of his life already published,—must be brought to a close. As his remains are about to be consigned to the earth of the State which he loved, and whose interests he faithfully served in public and in private station, the writer would lay this tribute on his grave, along with that which will spring from thousands of hearts throughout Minnesota, as they learn that he is gone from amongst us, forever. If our venerable and tried friend had faults beyond those which mar the characters of the best of us, we happily knew it not while he lived, nor would we know it now. If there were such, we are sure they must have sprung from the soil of an undisciplined youth, and that they did not form the controlling elements of a manhood and a manliness rich in intellectual strength and vigor, and richer in the rarer qualities which mark the possessor of a generous and unselfish heart. No history of Minnesota can be written which shall omit from its pages the scenes and incidents wherein, for half a century, he moved conspicuously; nor can such history be worthily written which fails to record upon the roll of its worthiest pioneers, the name of JOSEPH R. BROWN.

E. S. G.

November 14, 1870.

[From the St. Paul Press, November 12th, 1870.]

A dispatch was received on the evening of the 9th inst. by Dr. C. CARLI, of Stillwater, a brother-in-law of JOSEPH R. BROWN, announcing the death of the latter on that day at New York. No particulars were given beyond the simple announcement of the fact. Mr. BROWN went to New York some time ago for the purpose of superintending the construction of his traction engine or steam wagon—an invention of his own which he has been developing for years—and he was in unusual good health when he left the State on this errand. He could not have been much less than 70 years of age, and ever since his early boyhood has been a resident of Minnesota, where he

first made his appearance as a drummer-boy at Fort Snelling some forty odd years ago while that fort was in process of erection. Ever since he was discharged from the military service, which, if we recollect aright was in or about the year 1828, he has been conspicuously and actively identified with the history of Minnesota, from the earliest beginnings of settlement on the Upper Mississippi to the present time. He was an important and distinguished character among the first pioneers of settlement in this region, and has been a more or less important and distinguished character ever since. As early as 1831 Jo. BROWN, as he was then, and has ever since, been familiarly called, had an Indian trading post at Land's End, on the Minnesota river, about a mile above Fort Snelling. In 1833-4 he had established his trading post at Oliver's Grove, at the mouth of the St. Croix. At that time the only inhabitants in the country outside the fort were Indians—except a few traders at Mendota and elsewhere. BROWN was still engaged in the Indian trade when the speculative mania of 1837 set in, and distant as this portion of what was then Wisconsin was from its scenes, some pulsation of it reached these remote solitudes. BROWN was about the only man among the Indian traders of that time with sagacity enough to distinguish, in the hubbub of this wild movement of speculation and emigration, the march of that great westward development which was soon to take in the then remote wilderness of the Upper Mississippi. He at once set about, as soon as the Indian title was extinguished, to seize what seemed to him to be the salient points of the region hereabout. He first settled in 1838 at Gray Cloud Island, fifteen miles below St. Paul, where he had a trading post and farm. Two years afterward he formed the first settlement or laid out the first townsite at the head of Lake St. Croix, about a mile above the present site of Stillwater, and which he called Dahkotah, and about the same time he, with JAMES R. CLEWETT, bought the first claim made in St. Paul, from a discharged soldier. This claim embraced what is now Kittson's addition, and was bought for \$150. At this time BROWN, whose operations were extensive, owned an interest in a trading house on the Fort Snelling Reservation, on this side

of the Mississippi, which on Sept. 13th, 1838, was destroyed by a party of Sioux.

He was not only the pioneer town builder of Minnesota, but the pioneer lumberman, being the first to raft lumber down the St. Croix. In 1841 he was elected as representative of Crawford county, Wisconsin, which had been extended over the delta of country between the St. Croix and Mississippi. Here he succeeded in getting an act passed organizing St. Croix county, with his town—Dahkotah—as its county-seat. A judge of the district arrived one day at this county seat to hold court, but finding that it consisted of a single claim cabin, he seems to have resigned the judicial office for this locality to Jo. BROWN, who already absorbed all the other functions of government in the county of St. Croix. BROWN was at this time, as for some time afterwards, engaged in lumbering operations on the St. Croix, varied, if we remember rightly, by an interval of fur trading on Big Stone Lake. In 1847 he endeavored to obtain from the War Department permission to erect a warehouse, etc., at Fountain Cave, which was then within the limits of the Snelling Reservation, for the purpose of supplying the lumber trade just being started on the Upper Mississippi, by the erection of a saw mill at St. Anthony Falls. He was unsuccessful in this, but soon afterwards established a boom at the point indicated.

After the Territory of Minnesota was organized, Mr. BROWN at once took a leading and influential position in the politics of the Territory. He was elected Secretary of the First Legislative Council, which assembled in the fall of 1849 at St. Paul, of which DAVID OLMSTED was President. Mr. BROWN was, if we recollect aright, Secretary of the Second Legislative Council also. His tact, ability and shrewdness, were, we well recollect, the theme of general comment at the time. In 1853, Mr. BROWN varied his pursuits by succeeding to the ownership and editorial charge of the *Pioneer*, its former editor, Mr. JAMES M. GOODHUE, having deceased, and gave a new illustration of the versatility of his character and talents, by his success as a sharp and vigorous writer. We think it was in 1853, he was elected a member of the Legislature, representing the county of Dakota. For years previous and subsequent, he

lived in St. Paul, but at that time his family occupied a house on the bluff on the west side of the river.

Previously to this BROWN had laid out the town of Henderson, on the Minnesota river, and much of the early legislative log-rolling for which he was famous at that time, had reference to the building up of this point, which he endeavored without much success to make a depot of supply for the Indian country and Fort Ridgely. The steady and sedentary routine of the editor did not long suit BROWN's restless disposition and he was soon at Henderson again building and planning we forget what, but mills and warehouses and hotels were among his monuments.

He was soon after this appointed Indian Agent for the Minnesota Sioux, and plunged into his old Indian life again, if, indeed, he had ever deserted it. It may as well be said here that BROWN, like many of the old Indian traders, had married a Sioux woman, by whom he had a numerous family, and it was perhaps this circumstance, as well as the associations of all his early and middle life, which attached him so strongly to the Indians. Fitted by his abilities and character for any position or any career in the new centres of civilization which had sprung up around him, we find him at short intervals always going back to the Indians as agent or trader, or in some such capacity. He was, however, always planning new enterprises—and this haunter of Indian camps, this half Bedouin, was the founder of more embryo cities than any other half-a-dozen men in the State, and the planner of more schemes for its development than any other. He had a force, originality and genius of invention in him which was always propelling him in new paths. Among his inventions was his steam traction motor—or steam wagon.

It was a favorite project of his to build a wagon—propelled by steam—which would travel at will over the dry hard roads of our prairies. We think it was in 1860 that he had one built in New York, but after experimenting with it on the road between Henderson and Fort Ridgely he was forced to abandon it for the time as a failure. In the meantime the Indian war broke out, in which Mr. BROWN took an active part. Following the remnants of the friendly Sioux to Fort Wadsworth, he has

been occupied for several years in trading with them, and in business connected with the supply of the different agencies. He has, in fact, been the real Superintendent of Indian Affairs in that region, and has been chief counsellor of the agents and the government. But he had not, in the meantime, lost sight of his favorite project of a steam traction motor ; but has been, meanwhile, maturing his invention and his plans for its successful operation. Last winter he secured legislation enabling the counties of the State which desired this kind of transportation to provide a hard roadway for the purpose, by an issue of bonds to cover the necessary expenditure, and during the summer he has been in New York constructing his motor and wagon, which he is said to have so perfected that its practicability is now generally admitted. It is a sad culmination of a life which seems one chequered waste of unfulfilled dreams, that in the very hour when he was to have enjoyed the fruition of a scheme to which he had devoted so many years of his life, he was suddenly cut off from the living. JOSEPH R. BROWN, though not free from guile, was in the main an honest man. He was at any rate a generous one. He was possessed of a cheerful and happy temper, a *bon-homme* which nothing could ruffle. No taint of malice or spite or spleen, lurked in his robust, warm and healthy blood. If his mental powers had been disciplined to the routine of some profession or regular occupation, if he had not been dragged down by the slipshod half-vagabond associations and habits of his frontier life, from the high career for which he was formed, he would have been one of the foremost men of his day.

A drummer-boy, soldier, Indian trader, lumberman, pioneer, speculator, founder of cities, legislator, politician, editor, inventor, his career—though it hardly commenced till half his life had been wasted in the obscure solitudes of this far Northwestern wilderness—has been a very remarkable and characteristic one, not so much for what he has achieved, as for the extraordinary versatility and capacity which he has displayed in every new situation. The above is a hasty sketch of the life of the leading pioneer of Minnesota, mainly from the recollection of one who, without any intimate relations with him, cherishes a kind remembrance of his real worth and sincerely mourns his death.

J. A. W.

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